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ABSTRACT

This review of recent literature suggests that there exist gender-based problems in counselor training supervision. Several of these problems are discussed in this paper. Though opinions of counselors appear, for the most part, to support stereotypes, actual measurements of supervisor behaviors suggest that stereotypical definitions may not always be based in fact. While some female supervisors may misunderstand power in the supervisor role, some male supervisors appear to misunderstand the supervisory relationship. The problems associated with power differentials between supervisor and supervisee are examined in this paper. Responses to these problems from the counselor educator community are also discussed. These areas of concern for both male and female supervisors can allow understanding, as supervision evolves, to develop programs and supervisory skills which provide an optimum environment for learning and a safe environment for counselor trainee growth in interrelational skills. (Contains 33 references.) (MKA)

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# A Literature Review of Gender Issues in Supervision: Power Differentials and Dual Relationship

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**Abstract**

*A review of recent literature suggests gender based problems in counselor training supervision. These areas of concern for both male and female supervisors can allow understanding, as supervision evolves, to develop programs and supervisory skills which provide an optimum environment for learning and a safe environment for counselor trainee growth in interrelational skills.*

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## Introduction

Literature regarding gender issues is proliferating as American society moves toward equity-based workplaces. Bernard and Goodyear (1992) reported that little information is available regarding gender and supervision either in training counselors or supervision of professionals, but a body of empirical literature now exists that has drawn conclusions which allow Counselor Educators to form new ideas and offer new strategies to increase clinical training effectiveness.

Research indicates that gender issues exist in supervision. The literature suggests that the areas of concern are power differential (Nelson, 1989; Robyak, Goodyear, & Prange, 1987), nature of relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Davies, 1991; McCarthy, Kulakowski, & Kenfield, 1994), and sexuality (Miller, & Larrabee, 1995; Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Godl, & Unerod, 1988).

## Gender, Relationships and Power in Training and Supervision

There is an assumption in the literature that there are gender issues in supervision. However, illustrations of supervision issues in counseling are sometimes drawn from studies that have little to do with the actual subject. For instance one study emphasized that men make 75% of the interruptions in general conversation with women (Nelson, 1989). Other literature has relied on psychotherapy-based gender issues to define gender issues in supervision (Bernard, & Goodyear, 1992: Glaser, & Thorpe, 1986; Pope, Levenson, & Schoner,1979). When this thinking is applied to supervision and training, stereotypes begin to emerge. Bernard and Goodyear (1992) reflect this stereotypical view in their statement that gender supervision issues are based in "traditional sex roles" and "prevailing sex role standards." (p. 214) Ryder and Hepworth (1990) suggest that client-counselor gender issues are parallel to supervisor-supervisee issues because counseling and supervision are essentially the same thing.

When empirical research specific to supervision is examined, a different picture emerges. First, there are significantly more males who hold supervisory positions than females (McCarthy, Kulakowski, & Kenfield, 1994; Kurpius, Gibson, Lewis, & Cobert, 1991). To resolve this inequity is not an easy matter; when counselors were polled, both genders considered male supervisors to be more competent than female supervisors (Kurpius, et. al., 1991). Yet, counselors of both genders prefer a gender match in supervision (Fishman, 1978). The only study that gave evidence of equal preference for male or female supervisors measured a more narrow attribute, diagnostic credibility. This study (Carroll, 1999), the most recent, discovered that counseling students rated supervisors equally on diagnostic credibility across gender, training, credentials and student experience with no significant differences.

Though the opinions of counselors appear to, for the most part, support stereotypes, actual measurements of supervisor behaviors suggest that stereotypical definitions may not always be based in fact. One study has suggested that, when power positions were measured, all supervisors in the study ascended to power positions with no significant difference in gender of the supervisor (Davies, 1991). Another (Nelson and Holloway, 1990) produced evidence that both genders of supervisors also assumed more power with female supervisees than with males. However, these power roles changed as the supervisors matured and as the supervisees gained experience. Friedlander and Ward (1984) found that supervisors of both genders saw themselves as more sensitive with entry-level counselors. As supervisees developed skills, supervisors used more power involvement messages (Davies, 1991). It was also discovered that supervisors established more autonomous relationships with skilled clinicians than with trainees (McCarthy, et. al., 1994). Yet

another study discovered that supervisors of both genders gave more autonomy to opposite gender supervisees (McCullough, 1992).

A further study discovered no significant rate of difference between male and female supervisors in regards to assuming legitimate power - power gained by trustworthiness, socially sanctioned and not motivated by personal gain (Robyak, Goodyear, & Prange, 1987). Another author (Nelson, 1989) did not show evidence to support the author's hypothesis that male supervisors use a higher number of power messages. A conflicting study (Davies, 1991) discovered male power message differentials with supervisees but also reported incidence of the male supervisor lowering power messages when supervising a female. Contrary to stereotypes, Nelson (1989) gave evidence that women supervisors ascend to power - assume power positions - with both male and female supervisees far more frequently than male supervisors. The latest study measuring supervision styles by gender provided the most direct evidence of ascendant power in female supervisors (McHale & Carr, 1998). The study discovered significant evidence that, when family therapy trainees were supervised in different combinations of gender pairs, two differing patterns emerged. Female supervisors affected directive style of supervision with male trainees, which was correlated trainee resistance to the supervision. However, whenever either male or female supervisors were paired with same gender trainees they consistently took collaborative supervision stances whether trainees were cooperative or resistant. These findings could account for some of the opinions of supervisees toward competence of male supervisors (Kurpius, et. al., 1991), since there is evidence that suggests that power struggles lead to impasse in supervision (Ellis & Douce, 1994).

Male and female styles of supervision appear to take different forms. Male counselors in a study by Robyak, Goodyear and Prange (1987) showed a pattern of preference for referent power - interpersonal attraction based in assumption of common values, attitudes, opinions and experiences by the supervisee - which supervisees believe are supportive, assuring and nonthreatening. The authors suggested that there may, however, be more difficulty for the supervisee establishing independence.

Studies have suggested that there are gender-based representational systems that become an issue in supervision. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggest that women define identity in relationships, responsibility and interdependent care, while men emphasize individuation through individual rights, logic and justice. This may extend not just to supervisors but to the trainees themselves. A recent study using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator showed evidence that female counseling students scored higher on Perceiving (P), while male trainees scored higher on Thinking (T) (Romans, 1996). Bernstein (1993) restates this concept as women being emotion-focused in supervision while men are problem-focused. Bernstein points out that Bandler and Grinder, in developing Neurolinguistic Programming, discussed in detail the problems of conflicting representational systems in therapeutic communications. A recent cross-discipline study of clinical supervisees (Roman, 1996) supported Belenky and Associates' contentions.

**Ego Games**

Thus far, research has made a case for not only reconsideration of gender stereotypes in Counseling supervision but for some concern about ascendant power positions taken by female supervisors. The parallel process phenomenon (Bernard and Goodyear, 1992) may eloquently speak to this issue. If we assume that there is

some predictability in humans, then the observed ascendant power positions taken by subpopulations as status grows may apply (Gergen, 1991).

Psychoanalytic theorists have addressed issues of transference and countertransference in training and supervision for many years (Noonan, 1993). One psychodynamic perspective is that power differentials are seen in supervision as a resistance to change either of supervisee behaviors or of supervisor status (Kadushin, 1968).

According to psychodynamic theory the supervisee contends with power differentials by utilizing a set of well-defined ego "games". Supervisee games, according to Kadushin (1968), fall into four broad categories. The first is manipulating the levels of demand by the supervisor - subversion and flattery being typical manipulations. Redefining the relationship is another supervisee ploy suggested by Kadushin. A third category is reducing the power disparity by use of references to defer potential criticism. Kadushin postulates that this includes playing such games as "You Don't Remember" with the supervisor. The last supervisee category is control of the situation by admitting mistakes before others can comment and playing games such as "It's All So Confusing".

Kadushin contended that the supervisor is held to task first of all because the power differential is in his or her favor; second, considering the supposed supervisor expertise and experience, games should be relatively easily identified and nonparticipation the appropriate response. Kadushin believed that countertransference issues of feeling powerless, or important and admired can override the objectivity of the supervisor. On the other hand, he suggested that supervisors whose countertransference issues are power-based also initiate games. He identified two power differential-increasing games in which supervisors participate.

The first is "One Good Question Deserves Another." The second intends to change roles from supervisor-supervisee to counselor-client: it is called "I Wonder Why You Said That?" Because of the power differential, Kadushin assumed that responsibility for cessation of game-playing falls to the supervisor.

**Sexuality and Supervision**

While some female supervisors may misunderstand power in the supervisor role, some male supervisors appear to misunderstand the supervisory relationship. In four different studies (Miller & Larrabee; Pope, Levenson, & Schoner, 1979; Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Gold, & Unerod, 1988; Butler, 1975) male supervisors were far more likely to be sexually involved with supervisees than were female supervisors.

Pope, et. al. (1979) found that 17% of female psychologists reported having experienced sexual contact with faculty during training. Seventy-five percent of those stated that they had experienced contact with a professor and 47% stated they had experienced sexual contact with a clinical supervisor during training. Most of these contacts were with males. In this same study three percent of male students reported having experienced sexual contact during training, with no mention being made of the gender of the faculty member. Pope and colleagues found that thirteen percent of male educators reported sexual contact with students and only 4% of male supervisors. Interestingly, the trend found in counselor-client sexual contact of older male counselor with a younger female client was reversed in supervisor-supervisee relations. Supervisees of both genders involved in sexual contact with supervisors tended to be older.

Glaser and Thorpe (1986) reported that they also found that 17% of psychologist trainees had experienced sexual contact with psychology educators. Interestingly, the incidence of sexual contact with supervisors had significantly

dropped from the 1979 study by Pope from 47% to 27%. Again, older students reported more frequent incidence of sexual contact with faculty. Most students reported later feeling that they had been coerced and that the contact had hindered their professional development. Glaser and Thorpe (1986) noted that further studies might be expanded to include sexual contact between supervisors and professional counselors in the field.

A 1988 study by Fitzgerald, et. al. discovered that 26% of faculty in general reported sexual contact with students. There was some evidence in this study that social science departments had less incidence, but not significantly so. There was also substantial evidence that both genders engaged in an almost equal amount of sexual harassment. Fitzgerald and colleagues suggested there was data to give evidence that faculty initiated sexual contact either with female students or with both gender indiscriminately, but were more successful with female students. The authors reported that some of the sexual contact may have been by mutual consent. The fact that more female faculty were involved is congruent with the findings of Pope, et. al. (1979) that women who had sexual contact with male supervisors while they were in training had an significant increase in sexual contact with supervisees and clients as professionals. In fact, only 6% of women who had not had sexual interaction during training had sexual contact with clients while women who had experienced sexual contact approximated men's statistics with a 23% report of later sexual contact with clients (Fitzgerald, et. al., 1988). An earlier study of psychologists (Butler, 1975) suggested that 95% of those who had sexual contact with clients felt guilt, conflict and fear, but less than one-half had sought consultation .

The latest study (MIller & Larrabee, 1995) suggested that there me be a decreasing trend of sexual involvement between counselor educator and student and

reaffirmed that supervisors seem to be less sexually involved than other counselor educators. The authors discovered that only 6% of the female subjects had experienced a sexual relationship with professors and that only 2% had experienced a sexual relationship with a counseling supervisor. However, 19% had experienced what they considered sexual overtures. This may mean counselor faculty are less likely to seduce, but it may also suggest that counseling students are the ones who are more sophisticated and simply don't respond as often. Interestingly, Miller and Larrabee (1995) discovered that students who had sexual relations with faculty were likely to have had multiple partners and that most incidents occurred with divorced students. So few men reported sexual encounters that the authors chose to limit report to female students.

**The Response from the Counselor Educator Community**

Sexual ethics in counselor education has been increasingly addressed by various professional institutions including the American Psychological Association (Holroyd, & Brodsley, 1977), the American Counseling Association and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (Kurpius, et. al., 1991) among others. During the last several years ethical guidelines for supervisory relationships have been developed by various organizations (Gilbert, 1987; Dye, & Borders, 1990; Bernard, 1987). However, a recent analysis of standards for certification of counseling programs by the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), to determine how well the accrediting organization had addressed gender issues in training, discovered a dearth of gender-related references (Hoffman & Myers, 1996).

Kurpius, Gibson, Lewis and Corbet (1991) suggest a series of interventions designed to create a better ethical environment, including mandatory certification of

supervisors, self disclosure statements to potential supervisees, training for all supervisors, monitoring and support of supervisions as well as personal counseling for the supervisor to aid objectivity. Special courses in "cross-cultural sex and power roles stereotyping" complete their recommendations.

Ryder and Hepworth (1990) suggest that, except in the most extreme breaches of ethics, legislation against dual relationships would be too concrete and thus undesirable. Since, as they argue, life and counseling are complex, preparation should concentrate on the complexity of therapeutic relationships, exploring issues of exploitation and power. In their eyes regulation of dual relationships would actually facilitate exploitation by the increase in the power differential through avoidance of dual relationships.

Since Ryder and Hepworth assume equality in supervision to be unrealistic, they suggest the presentation of a philosophical stance in training: "one way to understand supervision . . . as a process of helping a neophyte therapist evolve, at least partly, into a colleague and perhaps a friend" (Ryder, & Hepworth, 1990, 129). They reference Kafka, "In a different context [Kafka] proposes that the original version of double-bind theory had it wrong. It is not contradiction and paradox that drives us crazy. Contradiction and paradox are inevitable. Rather, he says, it is parental intolerance for these things, intolerance for inevitable ambiguity, that is most destructive of our sanity" (Ryder, & Hepworth, 1990, 131).

Ellis and Douce (1994) suggest that the presence of the issue of sexuality is normal and so needs to be dealt with openly. The issue becomes, then, one of proper educational emphasis to learn appropriate response when situations are presented. In fact, research by Glaser and Thorpe (1986) revealed that only 22% of Psychology professors cover sexual issues thoroughly in the classroom, 45% cover sexual issues

"somewhat" and 33% never cover any sexual issues. The latest study (Downs, 2000) discovered that only 47% of counselor educators polled had received ethics training themselves, that most were uncomfortable responding to clinical sexuality questions, even more uncomfortable bringing them up, and felt that they were only somewhat prepared to respond to ethical dilemmas in either a clinical or educational situation. Since regulation has not worked by itself, consideration of the above recommendations to education seem like sound investments.

**Conclusion**

But what of these complexities and ambiguities; how do counselor supervisors decrease power differentials and establish more ethical relationships with students? Again, Bernstein (1993), using Neurolinguistic Programming's conflicts of representational systems model, stated that androgyny does not work. Bernstein suggests both genders of supervisors need to continue to use their own reference systems (men, problem-focused and women, emotion-focused) and learn to integrate the other gender's reference system into each supervisory session.

Earlier suggestions of evolution of the supervision relationship toward collegial status and learning to deal effectively with ambiguities of supervisory relationships may require far more personal skills. Allen, Szollos and Williams (1986) found that supervisors who had the most effective outcomes were open to feedback about their styles of relating to supervisees. They also modeled respect for differences of values, personal privacy, taught skills and encouraged novel approaches to therapy. This suggests that an open and continuous evaluation of the supervisor might not only decrease power differential but also the potential of sexual misconduct.

No matter what methods of supervisory ethical or relational growth are incorporated, it may be more a matter of existential concern. The motives of the

individual counselor supervisor may need be personally explored and understood for necessary changes to occur. Perhaps the idea advanced by the great ethicist, Cardinal Desmond Tutu (1996), is most elegant. Tutu posited that no one knows an individual has changed unless first the individual is willing to talk about the issue openly not with colleagues but with those they may have harmed, and then only if he/she tells the truth. At that point healing can take place.

The issues of gender are by no means resolved. Faculty dedicated to the resolution of gender issues within their own programs need to continue diligently toward an equitable solution that recognizes the need for increasingly collegial relationships with students while providing an ethical environment.

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